



Endless Opportunities

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Ron C. Cross

YEAR IN REVIEW

By Ron C. Cross, Board of Commission Chairman

As we begin a season of special family and friend celebrations, it is a time to reflect on the blessings and bounty that we all enjoy in Columbia County. Much has been accomplished for the citizens of the County this year, and we are continually challenged to perform our duties cost-effectively and with outstanding customer service.

Some of our accomplishments are readily visible like the new library and others are cost-savings such as the County's Wellness Program to improve the health of our employees which lowers our medical costs.

Most importantly, the Board of Commission has successfully strived to maintain a balanced budget and the same millage rate for 7 years. We have done this without sacrificing our reserve funds and have been recognized as one of the top fiscally-strong counties in Georgia, being one of only five counties with a AA bond rating.

A couple of our projects are large, but not seen at the moment - the new library and performing arts center and Blanchard Woods Park. These facilities have been under construction but not yet open to the public. A fundraising gala will be held on January 21st to provide individuals an opportunity to view the library and performing arts center in progress for the grand opening in April. The amphitheater is progressing well and will seat almost 700 for outdoor concerts and events this spring. The master plans for Blanchard Woods Park have been finished and a new road to the park has been built. The purchase of the property across the street from the Evans Justice Center is a legacy for the community. There are many thoughts on how this area should be improved, and they are being developed into a plan which will have more public input. Incorporation/consolidation remains possible and will be discussed by the citizens in 2006.

Public safety is the primary responsibility for a government, and 2005 was the implementation of the Fire Services Plan. New temporary fire stations were installed and much needed fire equipment was provided to the stations in the more rural area of the County. Additional improvements are being made and soon the whole unincorporated area of the County will have 24/7 full-time fire coverage with four new fire stations. The County's full-time and volunteer firefighters continue to play an important role in the excellence of our fire service.

Our low crime rate was a major factor in our being rated one of the Best Places to Live in the Nation by MONEY magazine this year, and our Sheriff's Office is to be commended. They are doing a great job keeping up with the growth of the County, and we all sleep better at night knowing they are on duty.

Growth is obvious at every turn in the County. Many of us are weary of the changes, increased traffic, slow progress, and new subdivisions which seem to appear overnight. The Board of Commissioners is sensitive to these observations and has improved subdivision regulations to provide better road construction and general oversight. We are continuing to "raise the bar" for retail/commercial development as we transition into a "nodal" growth pattern (i.e., retail/commercial areas are concentrated into "nodes" and residential areas are between nodes). We also have implemented three additional "overlay districts" to control architectural standards and landscape requirements and will finalize our Growth Management Plan update soon.

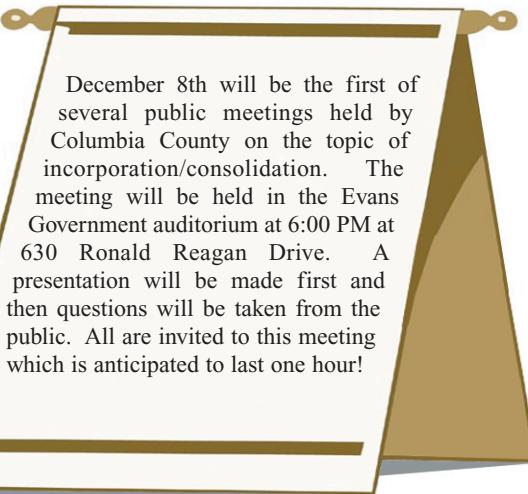
Thanksgiving has come and gone, the belt is a bit tighter, and the holiday rush has officially begun. I wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy holiday season. May you find profound joy and be renewed through these celebrations.

I am delighted that your Commission in Columbia County continues to open meetings with prayer to seek guidance and offer thanks to God. This country was founded on Christian principles, and we attempt to operate accordingly. However, when much is received, much is expected. This is our challenge for 2006.

A Special Sneak Peek!

Columbia County Arts is sponsoring a black tie fundraising gala for the new Library and Performing Arts Center on January 21, 2006 from 7 to 11 PM. Please make plans to join us for this special event! The cost is \$100 per person (tax deductible), and the proceeds will go for a grand piano and an endowment for the Performing Art Center and Library. Call 868-3484 for more information!

Incorporation/Consolidation Meeting



December 8th will be the first of several public meetings held by Columbia County on the topic of incorporation/consolidation. The meeting will be held in the Evans Government auditorium at 6:00 PM at 630 Ronald Reagan Drive. A presentation will be made first and then questions will be taken from the public. All are invited to this meeting which is anticipated to last one hour!

Traveling Over the Holidays

Are you worried about leaving your home unattended while traveling out of town? The Columbia County Sheriff's Office Housewatch Program provides for a deputy sheriff to check your home several times a day while you are away. It is easy to participate. Just call 541-2800 no more than three (3) days before you are leaving town to enroll in the Housewatch Program. Provide the dispatcher with:

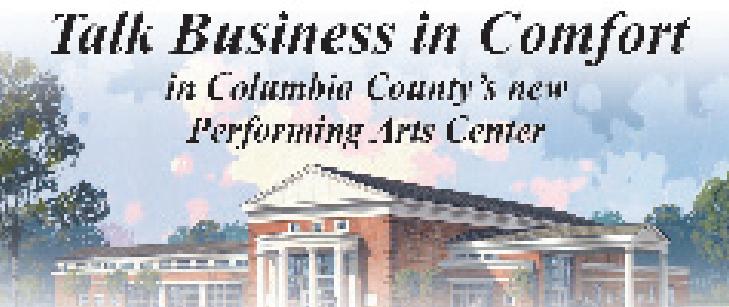


- An emergency contact number for you out of town
- The name of someone local to contact in case of an emergency
- Some specifics about the residence



The dispatcher will assign a number to your residence that you must have to cancel the housewatch.

Talk Business in Comfort in Columbia County's new Performing Arts Center



*Presentations - Award Ceremonies - Seminars
Convenient new facility in historic
Book now for 2016
Call Ellen Hill at (706) 868-3349*

Community Events

Dec. 3rd - CHRISTMAS IN AMERICA

The 5th annual Columbia County Christmas tree lighting celebration, "Christmas in America," will be held Saturday, December 3rd from 4:30-7:30 p.m. at the Evans Justice Center on Ronald Reagan Drive. Holiday activities include music and a sing-a-long, a visit from Santa, food and craft vendors, and the lighting of the Columbia County Christmas tree.



This year's honorary tree lighter is Justin Black, an Evans Middle School student, who came to Columbia County with his family after Hurricane Katrina forced their evacuation from New Orleans. Justin caught the final touchdown pass at the last football game to be played at the current Evans Middle School stadium. He will be joined by more than three dozen other Katrina evacuees now attending Columbia County schools, as well as Columbia County Fair Queen, Mandy Wheeler.

Musical entertainment during the "Christmas in America" celebration will be provided by local singing groups, church choirs, and the Columbia County Elementary School Mass Chorus comprised of more than 300 fourth and fifth graders under the direction of South Columbia Elementary School's Niki Chambers.

For additional information, please contact Columbia County Community Events at 706-868-3484.



Dec. 13th - HEGGIE'S ROCK TOUR GUIDE TRAINING

Training of volunteers to lead field trip visits to the Heggie's Rock Preserve in Appling is scheduled for December 13. The training session will be conducted by The Nature Conservancy in collaboration with Dr. Judy Gordon of Augusta State University. Prospective volunteers who have interest in tour guide training certification should call Community and Leisure Services at 868-3484 or email Barry Smith at bsmith@columbiacountyga.gov for details.

Dec. 17th - BREAKFAST WITH SANTA



The Patriot's Park gymnasium will be the site for the County's annual Breakfast with Santa on Saturday, December 17th from 8:30 to 11:00 a.m. The fee of \$5 per person includes breakfast, a photo with Santa, and holiday activities. Pre-registration is required by calling 706-312-7194.

To brighten Christmas for patients at the MCG Children's Medical Center, donations of NEW children's books will be accepted during this event.